BACKGROUND PAPER

VOLUME 11

THE ALBERTA WATER RESOURCES COMMISSION

Alberta
ENVIRONMENT

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ALBERTA WATER RESOURCES COMMISSION

The Alberta Water Resources Commission was established in 1983 to advise the provincial government regarding long term water resource planning, general water management policy and related matters. In setting up the Commission, and in subsequent appointments to it, the government has been careful to maintain a broad and balanced membership.

MEMBERSHIP

Elected Members

Throughout its life the Water Resources Commission has had two Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA's) as members, one of whom has served as Commission chairman. These members have represented both the drier, southern and southeastern part of the province and the more humid central and northern part. The MLA members provide a valuable link to government and an awareness of resource management and environmental issues throughout the province.

Mr. Alan Hyland, MLA for Cypress-Redcliff is the chairman of the Commission and Mr. Ty Lund, MLA for Rocky Mountain House, is a member.

Public Members

The Commission includes four public members selected from the public at large across the province. These members are: Mr. Tom Gilchrist, a rancher from Milk River; Mrs. Susan Ryan, a homemaker and geographer from Calgary; Mr. Phil Walker, a retired city commissioner from Edmonton; and, Mr. Gordon Reid, a retired businessman from High Level.

The public members of the Commission are not selected as representatives of organizations, businesses or interest groups. However, they have a strong awareness of local water management issues and public values throughout the province. The awareness of all Commission members is strengthened through public meetings, tours and contact with a wide range of Albertans concerned with wise water management. The public members help to stimulate thorough discussion of issues considered by the Commission.

Departmental Representatives

Five provincial government departments with direct and indirect water management responsibilities are represented on the Water Resources Commission by Assistant Deputy Ministers:

- Agriculture - Mr. Doug Radke
- Economic Development and Trade - Mr. Stan Schellenberger
- Environment - Mr. Peter Melnychuk
- Forestry, Lands and Wildlife - Mr. Murray Turnbull
- Municipal Affairs - Mr. John McGowan

The members from these departments represent a wide range of expertise and a broad and balanced perspective on water management issues. In addition, the Commission works closely with senior representatives both from within these departments and from other provincial departments on specific issues.

The Commission staff consists of an Executive Director (Dr. Alfred Birch), a Research Director and a secretary.

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REPORTING LINE

The Water Resources Commission reports to the provincial cabinet through the cabinet's Economic Planning Committee. It is not directly affiliated with any of the provincial departments or members of Cabinet. This supports the Commission's neutral perspective and "round table" nature.

COMMISSION PERSPECTIVES

The Water Resources Commission recognizes the many challenges involved in sound water management in Alberta. It sees water as a key to a healthy environment and the quality of life enjoyed by Albertans. It also understands the role of water in the economic life of the province. **Sustainable water management** is therefore a fundamental principle for the Commission. It believes that environmental protection and improvement, natural resource conservation and a healthy economy are compatible goals.

The Commission believes that **multiple use** of water should continue to be a guiding principle in Alberta. This involves management of the resources to meet the requirements of a variety of water users. In some cases it means that appropriate limits on consumptive uses will be necessary. It often means that adequate water quality standards should be developed and maintained.

Water quality protection and improvement is another objective of the Commission. Water quality is important for human health, ecological well being and a variety of other water uses. Good water management must view quality and quantity as complementary features.

It is also important to **integrate land and water planning and management**. Urban, agricultural, forestry or other land use practices may determine the quantity and quality of water for other users within a watershed.

The Water Resources Commission believes that genuine and open **public consultation** is important in the development of water management plans and policies. The Commission bases its consultation activities on such principles as the importance of two-way communication undertaken in a spirit of openness and trust, and the importance and legitimacy of all public input.

COMMISSION ACTIVITIES

Over its eight year history, the Water Resources Commission has carried out a variety of important activities which illustrate its perspectives and priorities.

South Saskatchewan River Basin Policy

Based on a series of public hearings in 1984, the Commission presented a report and recommendations on water management in the South Saskatchewan River Basin to government. Its recommendations included such things as the importance of multi-purpose use of water, protection of water quality and maintenance of stream flows for a variety of in-stream and ecological purposes, and improved water use efficiency and conservation.

The Commission is currently supporting an **In-Stream Flow Needs Study**, involving both research and public consultation in order to establish stream flow requirements for a range of non-consumptive uses and amenity values.

Due in part to these and later Commission recommendations, guidelines have been approved to limit the eventual growth of irrigation in the South Saskatchewan River Basin and a major review of provincial water management policy and legislation has been initiated.

Wetland Policy

In view of the continuing loss of valuable wetlands in the settled area of Alberta and the lack of a comprehensive management policy to coordinate provincial activities affecting wetlands, the Water Resources Commission and a number of cooperating departments developed a draft wetland policy for public discussion. A series of public workshops were held across the province in late 1990 to seek public response.

These workshops offered interested Albertans a means for constructive dialogue on wetland management and, in conjunction with a large number of written responses, provided valuable suggestions for the revision of the draft policy. The revised policy is expected to be recommended to government in late 1990. Portions of it, if approved, may be incorporated into a new provincial Water Resources Act.

Integrated Land and Water Research and Planning

The Commission has supported a number of integrated and innovative land and water planning projects. The **Sub-Basin Water Management Planning Program** in northwestern Alberta has demonstrated a comprehensive, watershed-based approach to such planning. This program has integrated such factors as erosion and flooding protection, agricultural development, wildlife habitat protection, municipal water supply and forestry operations.

The **On-Farm Water Management Study** has tested and demonstrated a number of new techniques for farm water management and conservation. Agricultural, wildlife and downstream hydrologic effects have been investigated.

Long range management and feasibility studies have been conducted for one irrigation district and are under way for a large portion of the dry Special Areas in southeastern Alberta. These studies examine multi-use proposals for local water management, including wildlife, recreational, domestic and agricultural water use.

Canadian Heritage Rivers System

The Water Resources Commission recognizes the importance of protecting the province's valuable rivers and their recreational and tourism potential. After careful consideration of a proposal for Alberta's participation in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, the Commission recommended participation in the program and specific consideration of possible candidate rivers or river reaches.

WATER RESOURCES ACT REVIEW

In January, 1991, Honourable Ralph Klein, Minister of the Environment, asked the Water Resources Commission to assist in the public review of water management policy and the provincial Water Resources Act. The Commission has agreed to chair the public workshops which will be held in the fall of 1991. In addition, the Commission, along with the Environment Council of Alberta, is assisting Alberta Environment in the various aspects of the public consultation process and will provide recommendations to the government on the new draft policy and legislation.

This partnership will help to ensure a meaningful opportunity for public comment and development of coordinated recommendations to government, reflecting the needs and wishes of a wide range of water users.

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